DEVICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) recognises the importance of digital literacy and the role of technology in education. The use of devices in education should enhance learning, build essential skills, and foster responsible digital citizenship.

ICT CAPABILITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Developing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability from Foundation to Year 6 equips students with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly digital world. Through technology, students:

- build confidence in research, communication, and problem-solving,
- develop critical thinking skills to assess digital content for credibility and relevance, and
- learn ethical and responsible ICT practices to foster safe online behaviours.

The integration of ICT across the curriculum can support learning to be more interactive and engaging and can enhance differentiated instruction. Primary students gain hands-on experience with digital tools, helping them become independent learners who can adapt to new technologies. This foundational knowledge is essential for lifelong digital literacy and responsible technology use.

DIGITAL LITERACY AND FUTURE SKILLS

Digital literacy, as defined by UNESCO (2025):

- includes the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately, and
- aims to empower people, in particular youth, to adopt a critical mindset when engaging with information to build their resilience in the face of disinformation.[1]

The Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Computer Society (ACS) report, *Tech Skills for the Next Generation*, highlights key challenges in digital education.

- **Teacher challenges**
  Over two-thirds of teachers report difficulties in delivering the Digital Technologies curriculum due to inadequate support and resources.
- **Support deficit**
  Only 25% of teachers feel they have sufficient resources, leading to reduced student engagement in technology subjects.
- **Declining Enrolment**
  Fewer students are enrolling in technology subjects in Years 11 and 12, impacting future workforce readiness.[2]

BALANCING SCREEN TIME

APPA acknowledges concerns about screen time and supports clear messaging to promote a balanced approach. Australian guidelines recommend that children and young people aged between 5-17 should have less than two hours of sedentary recreational screen time per day, excluding educational activities.[3] Schools should ensure that:

- device use supports meaningful learning and is not driven by trends, and
- students have opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and the pursuit of personal interests.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDTECH INTEGRATION

Evidence from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) highlights that effective technology use in education depends on skilled teachers. Even when student-centred and well-integrated, the implementation of educational technology (EdTech) requires:

- teacher guidance in critical thinking and contextualising feedback, and
- a focus on high-quality teaching rather than replacing teachers with technology.[4] ▸

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVICE USE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

1. **Bring your own device** (BYOD) in primary schools
   APPA encourages careful consideration of the implications of BYOD policies, including equity, security, and consistency of digital experiences.
2. Selecting the **best devices for learning**
   Teachers and leaders should critically evaluate the adoption of devices, apps, and digital tools to ensure they support curriculum objectives and student learning, add value to learning, enhance student engagement and align with pedagogical goals.
3. **Teacher professional learning**
   Professional development should be independent of commercial technology interests to ensure objective, evidence-based practices.
4. **NAPLAN**
   NAPLAN assessments are now online so ensuring that students are confident in the use of EdTech for assessment and learning is essential.
5. **Artificial Intelligence**
   AI is here. We must ensure it's used thoughtfully: age-appropriate, ethically, and in ways that support learning, creativity, and critical thinking for both students and teachers.
6. **Parenting Support**
   APPA acknowledges the challenging role parents have in supporting safe online behaviour and considers it imperative to provide training and support for all families.

MOVING FORWARD IN DIGITAL EDUCATION

APPA advocates for the following:

- Embed **digital-readiness training** in Initial Teacher Education (ITE).
- Strengthen ongoing **teacher professional development** (PD) in digital education so teachers are confident in choosing and using technology wisely, and confident in planning for the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability to be integrated across learning areas.
- Ensure teachers are confident in **learning design** to best position contemporary technology in the curriculum. Ensure a developmental skills continuum in digital citizenship is accessible.
- Expand the availability of accessible, ready-to-use **teaching resources**.
- Provide additional **human resources** to enable access to skilled coaches and to ensure IT systems and devices work effectively.
- Improve **equity in education** so learning with digital tools is enhanced.
- Provide **targeted support** to improve student digital literacy.
- Ensure that primary students have access to **quality devices** in a manner that doesn't place undue pressure on school finances.
- Make available a robust **'assessment' framework** for leaders to use when considering the introduction of any EdTEch (including Apps).
- Build **professional networks** for the sharing of innovative primary practice.
- Promote ways that AI can be used to broaden and build learning, and augment efficient low value tasks for teachers.
- Review mobile phone bans (which we support) to include restrictions on the use of mobile devices such as smart watches.
- **Parent education** along with access to quality resources that build their confidence in managing their child's digital environment.

SUMMARY

While technology plays a crucial role in contemporary education, its effectiveness depends on skilled educators, clear policies, and a commitment to digital literacy. **APPA calls for the meaningful and sustainable integration of technology in primary schools and a thoughtful, balanced approach to device use.** Supporting teachers and students in navigating the digital landscape will ensure that primary education remains relevant, engaging, and future focused.

1 "What you need to know about literacy". *UNESCO*. https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know. Last updated: 11 February 2025

2 "Tech skills for the next generation". *Australian Computer Society (ACS)*. https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/reports-publications/tech-skills-for-the-next-generation.html. April 2024

3 "Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians". *Australian Government: Department of Health and Aged Care*. https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians/for-children-and-young-people-5-to-17-years. Last updated: 6 May 2021

4 "Evaluating the evidence for educational technology: Part 1 – the technologies". *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited*. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlights/evaluating-the-evidence-for-educational-technology-part-1-the-technologies. November 2023

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